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TEACHING LATIN TRANSLATION

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Probably the most insistent of problems in connection with Latin teaching is that of translation. One has but to raise this question with a Latin class, "What is your most serious difficulty?" to get the answer, probably not in exactly these words, "I can't get this jumble of Latin words to mean anything." The widespread use of the pony is the pupil's own unguided reaction to this situation. Often the Latin teacher, to meet this latter situation, and with singular obtuseness to the real heart of the difficulty, redoubles his quizzings along the line of construction, thus emphasizing the purely grammatical phases of the subject. This process is disconcerting enough to the "pony-rider," but gives him little help in his fundamental difficulty. The teacher's time would probably be better spent if he went consciously about the task of teaching translation as a method of procedure.

The following experiment was begun in September, 1915, with a Vergil class of 24 students in Oakland City High School. Part of this class had had only Caesar; part, Cicero also. The course was elective. After some preliminary consideration, such as the life of Vergil, theme of the *Aeneid*, the Trojan War, etc., we turned to the problem of translation. The aim of the course was narrowed down to induce on the part of the student a maximum of translating ability, and to have him exercise that ability in my presence.

Usually, if a teacher attempts to anticipate any of his students' difficulties he does so by pointing out the usages peculiar to Vergil, but these can well be anticipated in the assignment from day to day, while the preliminary attention of the pupils should be focused on the more elementary, and probably elemental, usages which the pupil has met before but which he needs to have revived in order that they may be readily available. In order to meet this latter consideration we spent the first two weeks doing nothing but taking up word after word of the text, and by its ending inferring

the probable English phrase by which it should be translated. We avoided long excursions into grammatical fields. Often the pupil did not know the English equivalent for the word. His attention was thus focused on the element common to all translation, namely the association of an ending with a range of probable English words or phrases. This is the opposite of construction for construction's sake. For our purpose it is not important that the pupil know that *-ense* is an ablative of instrument, but it is important that he know its probable preposition as "by" or "with." The pupil gains no advantage by knowing that *sit* is a hortatory subjunctive, but he has gained when he has established the association between the verb form and the English idea of urging as expressed in such words as "let" or "should."

The pupil came readily to appreciate the fact that he could not always tell the usage of a word from its ending. This gave me the chance to say over and over again, "Neither could the Roman, but he waited until he saw it in relation to other words: then only did it convey a definite meaning."

In reviving these associations as above, the teacher must use all he knows of the laws of association the effect of primacy, recency, vividness, frequency, similarity, and logical sequences. Some of the associations formed in former years must perforce be broken up. The pupil who formerly has learned the second person, singular, present, subjunctive, in relation to the first and third person must come to know the former as an isolated unit whose ending immediately touches off its English associate. Two weeks' drill on these fundamental associations, in addition to two or three years' previous training, enables the teacher to secure responses invariably correct: responses which indicate a wide and accurate range of associations of endings with English words or phrasal translations. He is then ready to proceed to more elaborate processes, leaving the associations of Latin words peculiar to Vergil's vocabulary with their English equivalents to be established from day to day in contextual settings.

After this preliminary drill we divided our class period into two approximately equal parts. The first was given to a fluent reading of the review and advance, telling the story, etc. The latter half was given over to making the pupil explicitly conscious of the

fact that his problem was to translate from a language in which meaning is dependent upon the inflection of words into a language in which meaning is dependent upon position of words. I chose simple English sentences to show the latter and simple Latin sentences to show the former. It is a clear practical gain when a student realizes that the word *eum* by virtue of its form, and quite regardless of its position, receives the action expressed in the verb.

When this contrast between the two languages had been made as sharp as possible, I turned to the problem of increasing the range of the pupil's attentive processes. He was induced to take in word after word in a possible relationship, but to allow his mind to remain in suspense until the whole sentence had been apprehended. To this end I took up word after word of new material, and by questioning arrived at its probable use and meaning. Then I said, "Hold that word in mind until you have examined others in the same way on to the end of the sentence. Then you will realize if you were right in your preliminary conjecture." This habit is built up slowly.

Here is where the teacher should give his pupil the chance to see him translate. He should not be afraid to think out loud. He should afford his pupils every opportunity to see his mental processes in action, his perplexities, his associations, his inferences, his suspension of judgment, and, finally, his satisfaction as the sentence unrolls into a unit of thought.

In former days apprentices learned their craft by watching mastercraftsmen at work. If the master was pursuing the most economical method of procedure, his apprentice took on by sheer imitation an efficient skill, and consequently was saved the wasteful process of arriving at his own methods of procedure by trial and error-gropings. If the mastercraftsman could have analyzed his acts of skill into their elements, and have made his apprentice definitely conscious of these, the latter's progress might have been more rapid. By concentrating the pupil's attention upon the elements in his particular act of skill, and executing the act complete before him, the modern teacher of translation may combine the ancient principles of craftsmanship with the modern teachings of the efficiency experts: but this implies psychological as well as linguistic skill on the part of the teacher.

What shall be our final test for correctness of translation? In mathematics the pupil "gets the answer." This is his final check for correctness of procedure. In translating, the check is not so obvious. The best we may have is the satisfaction of our sense of consistency. When the elements of a sentence have been organized they must express a complete thought. When a pupil has decided upon a range of possibilities for a word, and has seen it in relation to other words, he is forced to choose the one best usage of the range of possibilities. By way of inducing this ability it has been my practice to translate all but the given word or phrase, thus leaving a blank to be filled in by the pupils.

This is somewhat analogous to the grammar-grade procedure in which blanks are left to be filled with appropriate expressions by pupils. In both cases the appeal is to the pupil's sense of consistency, though in both cases considerable sharp questioning is needed to show fallacies in the pupil's reasoning.

Summarizing, we find the following points entering into this mode of teaching.

1. The recognition of the teaching of translation as a definite problem to which approximately one-half of the usual period is devoted.
2. The revival of the association of Latin word-ending with English phrases and modes of expression.
3. The attempt to make the pupil definitely conscious that he is to translate from a language in which meaning is determined by word inflection into one in which meaning is determined by word position.
4. The broadening of the pupil's attentive process, thus allowing a suspended judgment.
5. Giving the pupil the chance to see how his teacher translates.
6. The satisfaction of the translator's sense of consistency as a check for correctness.

I have no exact measurements of the results of this type of teaching except that this class has made more rapid progress than any of six preceding classes; that it does sight-reading well; that those pupils who have had Caesar only do their work creditably and, not the least, they enjoy their Latin study-recitation.